

A Qualified Leader for Every Pennsylvania School

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Introduction

Thirty years of research tell us that school leaders play a substantial role in the academic achievement of their students. A recent review summarized this relationship: “A one standard deviation improvement in leadership practices is associated with an increase in average student achievement from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile . . . a statistically significant difference in achievement.”ⁱ Another study concluded that the principal’s leadership accounts for about 20 percent of the school’s impact on student achievement.ⁱⁱ

Concerns about school administrators have captured the attention of legislators around the country. During 2001, 39 bills relating to school leadership were proposed in state legislative sessions; ten of these became law by June 2001.ⁱⁱⁱ Pennsylvania legislators joined their colleagues around the nation in recognizing the critical role of school leaders. In 2002, Pennsylvania legislators commissioned a study “of the Commonwealth’s 501 school districts to determine if there is a shortage of candidates for principal and other administrative positions in urban, suburban, and rural districts at [the] elementary, middle and high school levels” (p. 10)^{iv} Included within this study were two recommendations:

The task force recommends that the Department of Education encourage the development of mentoring programs for new administrators and efforts by school districts to develop administrative talent from within (possibly in conjunction with colleges and universities).

The task force recommends that the Department of Education consider increased investment in recruitment and retention efforts and/or encouraging such efforts among the Commonwealth’s school districts and AVTS [area vocational-technical schools] (pp. 63-64).^v

In response to these recommendations, this paper: (a) describes the school administrator shortage in Pennsylvania, (b) summarizes selected literature on the retention of school leaders, and (c) proposes three policy changes.

Pennsylvania’s School Leadership Shortage

In 2003, Pennsylvania legislators commissioned a study of the state’s 501 school districts to determine if Pennsylvania is mirroring the nation in this critical shortage.^{vi} Their findings indicated that there were 4,211 principalship positions in the state with 279 positions left unfilled during the 2001-02 academic year.^{vii} Those numbers represent a seven percent vacancy rate.

Based on data from Table 7 of that report, the percentages of shortages by position and by category (urban, suburban, rural, and AVTS) reveal interesting results. Of all the shortages experienced in administrative positions in public schools (a vacancy in any position during that year), rural schools had the highest percent of vacancies in six of the 10 administrator categories^{viii}, suburban three of 10, and urban 1 of 10. Seventy-eight percent of the shortages experienced in the public schools were considered to be filled in a reasonable time, but only 46% of the AVTS schools responded that theirs were filled in a reasonable time. Between public schools and AVTS, AVTS schools that responded suggest they have a higher turnover rate than public schools. Coordinator, high school principal, and supervisor were the positions most difficult to fill. The positions indicating a severe shortage of qualified applicants most often were high school principals, supervisors, and senior high school assistant principals. Forty-two per cent of rural schools reported these shortages. Rural districts filled their vacancies slightly faster than the others did even though they experienced higher turnover.

The Pennsylvania task force discovered that the severity of Pennsylvania’s school administrator shortage varied across the state, with some areas reporting no dearth of administrative candidates for vacant positions. “In general, rural school districts seem to observe more shortages . . . than do urban and suburban districts. AVTS have seen similar shortages to that [sic] of the school districts (p. 44)”^{ix}

With respect to quality of applicants, the positions of supervisor, high school assistant principal, elementary assistant principal and middle school/junior high assistant principal had the greatest number of less qualified applicants apply. Reasons for shortages varied. Yet, in every position but superintendency the top reason for experienced shortages among public school and AVTS administrators was inadequate pay and compensation—to include retirement credits. Stress associated with lack of experience and/or qualifications was rated second, while stress created by job conditions associated with excessive demands was rated third. As will be noted in the following section, these findings correlate very closely with recruitment and retention reports conducted across the United States.

Retention of School Administrators: A Brief Review of the Literature

According to the Wallace Foundation Policy Brief, the number of positions in education administration is expected to grow by as much as 20 percent in the next five years. In addition, 40 percent of the current administrators will be eligible to retire in the next six years.^x Yet, studies have revealed that there is no statistical evidence of a nationwide *shortage* of certified candidates for the principalship.^{xi} On the contrary, educators complete the credentials to obtain principalship certification, but refuse to

enter that career path. This review examines barriers to recruitment and retention reported in national studies and affirmed in the task force report.

The findings of the Pennsylvania task force confirmed those of major reports in the literature, notably three studies commissioned by the Wallace Foundation to examine the administrator shortage in the US. In the words of Richard Laine, director of education programs at The Wallace Foundation, “. . . the ‘shortage’ issue is actually a ‘conditions’ issue. We need to balance our efforts of attracting and strengthening education leaders with changing the conditions and systems in which they work. State-level policies, district hiring practices and resource allocations need to be aligned so that they support efforts to attract effective leaders at the district and school levels.”^{xii}

Although principals have entered the field aware of the job intensity, the role and responsibilities have become more difficult over the last decade. Principals must now lead their schools through the challenges of complex environments, such as curriculum standards, state testing, programmatic requirements, and other policy directives from national, state, and local sources. Principals need to respond to increasing diversity, including cultural background, immigration status, income disparities, second-language acquisition, and special learners. They must collaborate with numerous social agencies that serve children.^{iv}

Researchers acknowledge the additional complexity of attracting and retaining school administrators for *rural areas*---those areas where Pennsylvania faces its most acute problems.^{xiii xiv} Faced with unfunded mandates and limited revenue sources, principals in rural areas encounter serious barriers to job satisfaction.^{xv} Compounding these problems are the work schedules of these educators. Because they often have no assistants, rural school leaders work long hours. They are obligated or expected to be present at numerous school and community events, despite earning salaries that fall below those of their city and suburban peers. As Ferrandino testified, “. . . principals are the original 24/7 employees. That’s exactly how much they are on call . . . 24 hours a day, seven days a week. After their extremely long days, they are expected to attend many, many evening and weekend meetings and events.”^{xvi} A California task force on administrator shortages recommended that districts use flextime (working at home to do paperwork) and ensure that principals take their acquired vacation time (providing coverage for vacations and not scheduling school meetings during all available vacation times).^{xvii}

Howley and her colleagues (2003) recommended four strategies for the recruitment and retention of rural school leaders:

1. Publicize the satisfactions of the position

2. Encourage applications from women and minorities
3. Improve salaries and benefits
4. Provide professional development programs that enable new administrators to meet the challenges of their roles.

The latter two recommendations consider work conditions that support the retention of school administrators, the focus of this review.

Compensation and Benefits

Job benefits to attract and retain administrators include stipends for advanced course work, portable pension plans, and higher salaries to compensate for the longer work year. Several reports cite the discrepancy between the principal's salary and the higher salaries (and shorter work year) of those supervised. A California study showed that beginning administrators often found themselves earning *as much as \$40 per diem less* than they earned as teachers.^{xviii} To address the problem of compensation, Hawaiian law provides incentives to exemplary school leaders to accept and remain in long-term assignments in hard-to-staff schools.^{xix} Several studies reported that elementary schools typically attract more applicants than high schools, due to the perception that high school students are more challenging.^{xx} Yet, a candidate for a high school position not only faces the potential of less pay per diem, but also faces longer hours, more evening and weekend events, and very likely more students and staff to supervise.

Professional Development and Networking

Professional development opportunities for rural educators may require an investment in distance learning, paid leaves for study, and opportunities for professional networking. Among the suggested approaches to support principals is the development of individualized professional learning plans, calling on internal and external resources:

Because administrators often cite the "lonely nature" of their jobs, those individual plans could be vehicles for professional peer-interactions or "colleagues in conversation." Single administrator districts should form consortiums or cooperating ventures to develop professional interactions . . . Individualized plans would allow administrators opportunities to renew and refresh their knowledge and skills in ways uniquely suited to each individual---an incentive to remain in the profession (no page given).^{xxi}

Maryland and Virginia laws permit retired teachers to earn salaries in administrative positions,^{xxii} an approach that might allow rural administrators either to

acquire assistants or to be relieved of their duties for while engaged in professional development and networking.

A number of reports have cited the value of mentoring and internship programs, whereby aspiring or new school administrators work and learn with veteran staff:

We strongly endorse initiatives at the local school district level to recruit and develop local talent, or a “grow your own” program. One way of encouraging individuals from within a district to consider administration is to create leadership teams or quasi-administrative internships. These “on the job” experiences provide potential leaders, many of whom are teachers or other education service providers, with exposure to the administrative realm and give them opportunities for training and mentoring. This approach provides an inductee with personal contact in a familiar setting. At the same time, it allows the district to oversee the training of its future leaders, thus ensuring stability, institutionalization of reforms, and a continuation of the district culture. Because some smaller districts may not have the resources to devote to such a measure, we recommend that . . . regional collaboratives work closely with them to promote teacher leadership initiatives (no page given).^{xxiii}

Internship programs enlarge the existing pool of qualified candidates and create a career ladder (teacher, teacher-leader, administrative intern, then administrator). Not only do they prepare teachers for the challenges of the principalship, but also they provide ongoing coaching to assist new administrators in managing those many challenges.

Moreover, such internship and mentorship programs, if they bring energetic teacher-leaders into the overburdened principal’s office, could a) affirm veteran principals’ belief that theirs is valuable work; b) relieve their stresses associated with too many demands and not enough time or help; and, c) reduce the sense of isolation often reported by administrators working alone. These functions might reduce the risk factors known to result in occupational stress and burnout, including loss of a sense of community, excessive workload, and a feeling of ineffectiveness^{xxiv}. “Perhaps the most cited cause for leaving the profession is burnout (no page given).”^{xxv}

*Restructuring the Position*¹

Restructuring the administrative position, in particular the development of a management team, has been heralded as a retention strategy.^{xxvi} This approach typically calls for the distribution of managerial duties to allow the building principal to focus on instruction.

Summary of the Literature

A major report incorporating the three studies commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, offered this cogent summary of the administrator shortage:

The national mandate to “leave no child behind” has placed the need for quality school leadership into bolder relief than at any time in our history. After more than 20 years of concerted but disappointing reform efforts, states and districts are gradually coming to recognize that it takes skilled leaders to orchestrate the changes needed to support better learning for every child. What hasn’t been as widely grasped is that it will require improvements in job conditions and incentives in public education to draw enough high quality leaders to the schools that need them most.

These three reports all lead to one conclusion. It is time to move beyond the pipeline, away from policies aimed solely at increasing the number of certified candidates, and focus far more attention and resources on reforming policies and practices to:

- Adjust incentives and working conditions to enable non-competitive schools and districts to attract qualified leadership candidates;
- Bring local recruitment and hiring practices into line with heightened expectations for principal performance; and
- Redefine the job itself in ways that allow principals to concentrate on student learning above all else (p. 11)^{xxvii}

Given the national findings, the policy focus of the EPFP team, and the nature of the problem in Pennsylvania, our policy proposals narrowly focus on practices endorsed by other state commissions and experts in the field, with a special emphasis on the retention of school administrators in rural areas. The next section outlines these policy recommendations.

¹ Given the educational funding crisis in Pennsylvania, policymakers are not likely to endorse co-principalships or other models expanding the number of paid administrators in Pennsylvania’s rural districts. Therefore, this strategy was not explored in depth.

Policy Recommendations

Based on our review of the literature and our analysis of the Pennsylvania school administrator shortages, we have developed three policy proposals: compensation, learning support system, and retirement with longevity incentives.

Compensation

The most recent Pennsylvania K-12 educators' salary survey available describes 2001-2002 compensation.^{xxviii} Based on a comparison of the average salaries for teachers and administrators in 2001-2002, principals receive only \$91.01 per week or only 6% more than teachers do. This analysis is based upon 52 weeks for the administrator and 36 weeks for the teacher. If the salary comparison remains constant even though salaries have increased since 2002, there appears to be no salary incentive for teachers to move into the administrative arena.

Our recommendations include:

(1) State legislation should be enacted to require that a district pay principals using a formula that would include their years of teaching, the salary step when they left teaching to move into administration, and then a per diem rate based upon the next per diem salary step times the number of days in the administrative contract.

PA once had a state minimum salary for teachers. We propose a similar concept for principals---a "minimum" principal salary formula wherein each district would establish a baseline using its own teacher salary scale. Consider the following example: School district A has a step six teacher salary of \$40,000. The per diem rate at that step for a 182-day school year is \$220 per day. If a teacher (who has completed principal certification and the five-year experience requirement) were hired as a principal, her contract might be for 260 days with paid vacation and holidays. If the salary differential were in place, her salary based on a per diem calculation would be $\$220 \times 260 = \$57,200$ for the 12 month contract, plus the cost of benefits, social security, unemployment compensation and retirement. On the other hand, if this principal position were only a ten-month contract, then the salary would be $\$220 \times 220 = \$48,400$ plus the cost of benefits, social security, unemployment compensation and retirement.

(2) Salaries based on a formula described above should be adjusted and commensurate with the complexities of the job.

As principals move from elementary schools to middle schools and finally to high school or AVTS schools they encounter greater complexity in their responsibilities

and experience increased demands on their time and talents. Therefore, they should be paid more for occupying these positions. This could attract them to the jobs and then to sustain them in those positions. Therefore, we further recommend that a formula like that suggested above serve as a baseline for elementary school principals with step increases that compensate principals at higher levels. For example, a 10% increase would fairly attract and retain middle school principals and another 10% increase would fulfill the same purpose for high school/AVTS principal positions.

(3) Principal minimum salaries should keep pace with salary increases for teachers.

When teachers' salaries increase, principal salaries would increase proportionately. Our team identified that there is no "driver" existing to ensure that principal salaries remain competitive vis-à-vis teacher salaries.

(4) The state should allocate supplemental funds to designated school districts that do not have the resources to meet compensation minimums.

School districts that are severely under-resourced would be disadvantaged further by a compensation mandate such as that recommended above. These funds would provide the differential to ensure that even Pennsylvania's poorest districts are not further disadvantaged and have the opportunity to attract and retain qualified candidates. Currently, these districts lose principals who migrate to wealthier districts.

Learning Support System Proposal

(5) Similar to the teacher-mentoring program, we propose a master principalship program.

Besides the need to make the principalship more financially appealing, there is a need to support and retain new principals as they make the transition from teacher to building leader. Principals moving to more complex levels of leadership (middle school and high school) will benefit from support systems manned by more experienced and accomplished leaders. Similar to the teacher-mentoring program, we propose a master principalship program. This group will be comprised of principals selected by their school districts because of their superior leadership qualities. Nominated principals must commit to three-year renewable tenure to ensure that their districts get a return on their investment. These principal leaders will receive a stipend of at least one percent of their base annual salary, paid for by their school districts. The school district will provide release time for principal attendees and travel expense reimbursement related to these activities. Master principals will mentor these new principals.

(6) *Each school district establishes a learning support system for principals to include participation in a regional Leadership Center for principals with Administrator I certification.*

The Center enrolls the principals in a three-year program that includes regular meetings of the principal group, an on-line program in advanced leadership skills, and a technology-based discussion system. The school district will provide release time for principal attendees and funds for costs (travel, per diem) related to these activities. Principals must complete the Leadership Center program in order to receive Administrative II certification. Principals completing Administrator II certification will be expected to serve as mentors to other principals enrolled in the program.

(8) *Schools districts will receive regional support from their local intermediate units.*

The intermediate units will plan common professional development seminars throughout the academic year and provide network infrastructure to support this program.

Retirement with longevity incentives

(9) *We propose a retirement incentive system tied to years of service based on a 30-year career.* Pennsylvania needs incentives to retain effective principals over time. As described earlier, retirement systems between principals and teachers are not comparable. We suggest a retirement incentive system tied to years of service based on a 30-year career. Existing pension programs would remain in effect. The incentive program is based on the state making matching contributions to a supplementary 401K principals' retirement fund according to the following scale:

For non-master principals:

Time in service	State matching fund rate
0-5 years	1: 1
6-10 years	1: 1.5
11-20 years	1: 2.0
21-30 years	1: 2.25

Master principals would be rewarded according to an increased scale. For every dollar they invest in the retirement fund, the state would match the funds according to the following scale:

Time in service	State matching fund rate
0-5 years	1: 1.5
6-10 years	1: 2.0

11-20 years	1: 2.5
21-30 years	1: 3.0

Conclusion

If frustrated school administrators in high-need areas abandon their posts, the shortages will continue. Moreover, when teachers scan the administrative environment and observe poor working conditions and less pay, these potential candidates will opt out of the administrative career ladder, thereby exacerbating the shortage of applicants. As Vincent Ferrandino, Executive Director for the National Association of Elementary School Principals, summarized the problem for the Connecticut State Legislature, “Long hours, too much stress, and too little pay for the weighty responsibilities required in running a school are the chief reasons.”^{xxix} In other words, the problem of administrative vacancies is not merely one of attracting and hiring good candidates. Pennsylvania policymakers also must look beyond the pipeline.

ⁱ Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., McNulty, B. (2003). Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement. Mid Continent Research for Education and Learning.

ⁱⁱ Leithwood, K. & Riehl, C. (2003). What we know about successful school leadership. American Educational Research Association.

ⁱⁱⁱ Groff, F. (2001). Who will lead? The principal shortage. *State Legislatures*, October/ November 2001 retrieved on February 26, 2005 from <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/1101prin.htm>.

^{iv} General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Joint State Government Commission, Task Force on Administrative Shortages (2003). Administrative shortages in Pennsylvania’s public school districts.

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^{vi} General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Joint State Government Commission, Task Force on Administrative Shortages (2003). Administrative shortages in Pennsylvania’s public school districts.

^{vii} In terms of additional and more current data to inform this policy, the Task Force made a recommendation for further study:

The “Quality of Applicants for School Administrators” survey conducted by the Joint State Government Commission, as a part of the task force study, captured a snapshot of data from the Commonwealth’s school districts and AVTS for one school year only. The Commission’s study was constructed in such a manner that it can be readily replicated to continue to collect data over a period of time. The task force believes that this [sic] data should continue to be collected and analyzed on an annual basis in order to determine whether there is an ongoing problem in attracting qualified applicants for school administrative vacancies in Pennsylvania’s school districts and AVTS.

Furthermore, the continued collection of data will not only allow the Commonwealth to continue to identify whether a shortage exists, it will allow a more accurate determination of which districts may be experiencing the greatest problem in this regard. Thus, the task force recommends that the Commonwealth's Department of Education continue to study this issue, on an annual basis, using the model developed by the Joint State Government Commission for this study, or a similar model, and that the Department report its finding to the House and Senate Education Committees, on an annual basis, along with recommendations (pp. 62-63).

The survey on administrative shortages appears to be the only one that exists. Mr. Cowell and Mr. Stinson Stroup, the Executive Director of the PA Association of School Administrators, had no knowledge that the recommendation (continuing to survey the districts) was ever addressed. Therefore, what we know is based on this limited sampling and snapshot of the problem (results were from 2001-2002 AY). However, information from other state, regional, and national sources can, by extension, confirm some of the results of the data, while other results may require further investigation. Based on its survey of districts and testimony from its public hearings, the task force concluded that the primary reasons for the shortage were inadequate compensation, lack of interest among teachers who could move into administrative posts, and the occupational stress associated with school leadership positions.

^{viii} e.g., superintendent, assistant superintendent, high school principal, high school assistant principal, supervisor, etc.

^{ix} General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Joint State Government Commission, Task Force on Administrative Shortages (2003). Administrative shortages in Pennsylvania's public school districts.

^x The Wallace Foundation (2003). Beyond the pipeline: Getting the principals we need, where they are needed most. Retrieved on February 24, 2005, from <http://www.wallacefunds.org>

^{xi} The Wallace Foundation (2003). Beyond the pipeline: Getting the principals we need, where they are needed most. Retrieved on February 24, 2005, from <http://www.wallacefunds.org>

^{xii} New Wallace Foundation Studies Reveal Increasing Supply of Principals is Not Enough, retrieved on February 16, 2005 from <http://wallacefoundation.org/WF/NewsRoom/NewsRoom/PressRelease/5-30-03-SupplyofPrincipals.htm> (no page number)

^{xiii} Howley, A., Chadwick, K. & Howley, C.W. (2002, April) Networking for the nuts and bolts: The ironies of professional development for rural principals. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 463 908)

^{xiv} Stern, J.D. (1994) The condition of education in rural schools. Washington, DC: U.S. government Printing Office. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 371 935)

^{xv} Howley, A & Pendarvis, E. (2003) Recruiting and retaining rural school administrators. Retrieved on February 27, 2005 from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-4/rural-administrators.html>.

^{xvi} Ferrandino, V.L. (2000). The principal shortage: Issues and recommendations. Testimony presented to the Commission on Teacher and School Administrators Shortage and Minority Recruitment. Connecticut State Legislature, Hartford Connecticut, September 27, 2000.

^{xvii} ACSA Task Force on Administrator Shortages. (June 2001). Recruitment and retention of school leaders: A critical state need. Sacramento, CA

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^{xix} Groff, F. (2001). Who will lead? The principal shortage. *State Legislatures*, October/November 2001 retrieved on February 26, 2005 from <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/1101prin.htm>.

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- ^{xxiv} Maslach, C. & Leiter, M., (1997) *The truth about burnout: How organizations cause personal stress and what to do about it*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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- ^{xxvii} The Wallace Foundation (2003). Beyond the pipeline: Getting the principals we need, where they are needed most. Retrieved on February 24, 2005, from [http:// www.wallacefunds.org](http://www.wallacefunds.org)
- ^{xxviii} www.pde.state.pa.us/k12statistics/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=79992, Appendix A
- ^{xxix} Ferrandino, V.L. (2000). The principal shortage: Issues and recommendations. Testimony presented to the Commission on Teacher and School Administrators Shortage and Minority Recruitment. Connecticut State Legislature, Hartford Connecticut, September 27, 2000.